UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/90/17

INSTRAW: TEN YEARS LATER

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination).

On 3 May 1990, Ms. Dunja Pastizzi-Ferencic, Director, United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), gave NGO representatives an outline of INSTRAW operations during its ten years of existence.

Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic began by pointing to the crucial role of NGOs in shaping INSTRAW history since the idea to create the Institute was launched in 1975. Today, INSTRAW is a large network which operates from a small developing country in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic. Yet, the advances in communication technologies have enabled us to reach all regions of the world, she said. INSTRAW initiates world-wide action for the advancement of women through all five Regional Commissions of the United Nations and in co-operation with the United Nations bodies and agencies.

It was a great challenge to try to establish a new United Nations Institute ten years ago, without funds and during financial hardships for both developing countries and the United Nations, Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic said. However, the continuous encouragement from NGOs gave INSTRAW force to go forward in an area of great importance not only for women, but for the entire developmental process. The 1980s were "the lost decade" for development, she said. The April 1990 Special Session of the General Assembly on International Economic Co-operation had estimated the total external debt of developing countries to be approximately $1,3 trillion. In Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic's view, women suffered the most from the consequences of "the lost decade". She referred to this phenomenon as "the feminization of poverty". She provided data on the negative effects of the crisis to women in developing countries. Feminization of poverty can be observed also in the most developed countries, she said, pointing to a recent U.S. Information Service survey which showed that 60 per cent of all adults living in poverty are women and that 53 per cent of poor households in the United States are headed by women.

In its efforts to analyze the situation of women in all sectors of society around the world, INSTRAW has studied the role of women in international economic relations, according to Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic. Based on this study, the book Women in World Economy has been published. However, she said, all the conclusions were based on conventional economic wisdom and traditional forms of data gathering and analysis. One of the main objectives of INSTRAW programmes is to improve concepts for data gathering on women, in order to achieve real insight into women's lives and their contribution to the economy. Ten years ago INSTRAW started, in co-operation with the United Nations Statistical Office, a vast programme to compile all possible data on women. Concurrently, innovative concepts which underline data gathering on women have been launched . Ten years later, INSTRAW methodological studies were used in preparing the first statistical, internationally comparable database on women, called WISTAT. (Available on floppy disc).

Among INSTRAW's most important research projects is the attempt to measure women's real contribution to Gross National Product (GNP). The Institute tries to demonstrate that women are not a vulnerable group of welfare and social cases, but rather the backbone of society. INSTRAW has obtained endorsement from the United Nations Statistical Commission and all other relevant expert bodies that women's contribution in households and informal sectors of society should be included into SNA supplementary accounts. As an example, Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic pointed to an unofficial estimate which indicated that 60 per cent of food production in Sub-Saharan Africa is done by women in informal sectors of the economy. Already in 1986, she said, more than 20 per cent of GNP in all countries of the world was produced by the informal/household sector. The old methodology did not take into account possible women's work. Today, most developing countries have this dual economy of the formal and the informal sector.

Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic said the collection of data on women is needed in order to improve developmental policies. Activities which are invisible in statistics do not enter plans and programmes of economic development. Only NGOs provide assistance to the informal sector of the economy, fortunately with growing support from bilateral agencies. INSTRAW is planning the first expert group meeting whose goal will be to outline policies for women in the informal sector and ways to reflect the dual sector economy situation in developmental plans and programmes. The objective is not to subject the informal sector to fiscal policies, but rather to find ways to give this sector incentives so that it continues to be the machine of national growth and development. For instance, Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic said, how can women's access to credit be secured without collaterals and guarantees? Experience from all regions of the world shows that informal credit arrangements have a repayment rate of 90 per cent, by far surpassing the repayment rate of formal loans.

People working in the informal sector should be offered training, Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic said. Improvement of skills and activities in this sector is crucial. One important part of the informal sector which is completely left out of any rural development assistance, but which nevertheless feeds the entire population in developing countries, is the subsistance agriculture. INSTRAW is preparing guidelines for policy- and decision-makers all over the world on how to deal with the informal sector of the economy.

A study on aging women was a new addition to INSTRAW programmes on statistics, the oldest programme of the Institute and in Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic's opinion its most successful. This study is currently being broadened with the development of new statistical concepts on aging women. INSTRAW tries to change general conceptions of the aging as a vulnerable group. Predictive data on the 21 century show that the working population will have to support an increased number of aging. We have to break new grounds in the statistical field in order to change the concept of aging, she said.

Turning to INSTRAW's training activities, Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic said the first step is to define the target group. The Institute has conducted a world-wide survey on the training needs about women and development. The results of the survey demonstrated that the most important target group is men in decision-making positions, United Nations staff included. Another prominent target group identified by the survey were women's organizations. It was found that they need more substantive knowledge on how to approach women's problems from a developmental standpoint. INSTRAW has organized a number of training courses all over the world for those identified target groups in the hope that the trained people will pass on their knowledge. People are mainly trained in their own country. The Institute produces comprehensive training materials and packages with audio-visual aides which are sent to course organisors worldwide. Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic emphasized that more financial means are needed to meet all the requests for training packages.

Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic said INSTRAW tries, within its limited financial resources, to use the most advanced communication technology to reach both decision-makers and people at the grassroot level. Relevant software which is applicable in developing countries has to be developed. Ten years ago, when INSTRAW started looking into the issue of communication, 30 per cent of urban women and 60 per cent of rural women claimed never to have listened to a radio. In 1987, expert group meetings in Rome explored ways to use communication technologies to reach women in developing countries. In conclusion, Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic noted that INSTRAW has joined forces with the United Nations family of organizations and agencies in an effort to enhance community-based and gender-sensitive development policies.

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READEX FICHE

UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/90/18

FREE, INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA: THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS TRANSITION ASSISTANCE GROUP (UNTAG)

Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available for NGO representatives for their information and free distribution).

On 17 May 1990, H. E. Mr. Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations and former Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Namibia, briefed NGOs on the role and contribution of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in the independence process of Namibia.

Mr. Legwaila began by discussing Security Council resolution 435 (1978) of 29 September 1978, which established UNTAG to ensure the early independence of Namibia through free and fair elections under the supervision and control of the United Nations. The implementation of the resolution began more than ten years later, on 1 April 1989. Unfortunately, Mr. Legwaila said, that date had become infamous, because of violent confrontations between South African forces and those of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).

Due to unfavourable circumstances in 1978 and the following years, it had been possible to implement Security Council resolution 435 only last year, according to Mr. Legwaila. He said he went to Namibia knowing that the implementation of 435 would be a success; he had only been uncertain about the degree of success and whether it would be acceptable to the people of Namibia and the international community. However, he said, the degree of success in Namibia was not in dispute, and the elections had been found to be free and fair by all parties concerned.

During April and May 1989, meetings held by the Joint Commission (composed of Angola, Cuba and South Africa with the United States and the Soviet Union as observers) helped the United Nations put the implementation of Security Council resolution 435 back on track by the end of May. South Africa had been convinced by circumstances beyond its control that the process had to be continued, Mr. Legwaila said. The implementation of the resolution and the return of refugees had been delayed for some weeks as a consequence of the violent encounter of 1 April. 41,000 refugees had to be repatriated into Namibia from refugee camps in Angola, Botswana and Zambia under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Mr. Legwaila emphasized the uniqueness and success of this UNHCR operation.

Turning to the organization of the Namibian election, Mr. Legwaila said UNTAG was involved in three stages:

(1) Registration of voters

This process was controversial, Mr. Legwaila said. UNTAG had to implement a plan in a country under the control of South Africa, whose continued presence in Namibia had been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice and the General Assembly of the United Nations. Yet, South Africa was to draft the registration, electoral and constituent assembly laws. As there was no Namibian citizenship law, the South African-drafted Registration of Voters proclamation gave people, regardless of their country of residence, the right to register to vote if they could (a) produce documentary evidence of their Namibian perentage; or (b) prove that they had lived in Namibia for four consecutive years. These two aspects of the registration law caused much controversy, Mr. Legwaila said. Some 11,000 South African whites who met these criteria had registered and about 6,000 of them voted.

According to Security Council Resolution 435, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General had to be satisfied at every stage of the implementation of the plan. In order to determine whether conditions existed for registration of voters, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari (the Special Representative) and Mr. Legwaila (Deputy Special Representative) visited areas of conflict in Northern Namibia before the start of registration and met community leaders who advised that registration should start even though security condiditions were not perfect or normal.

Nearly 7,000 people from 110 countries worked for UNTAG in Namibia, Mr. Legwaila said. He paid tribute to the UNTAG staff, whom he called his "unsung heroes", for working up to a year separated from their families and often under difficult conditions. UNTAG was present in 190 areas in Namibia. The country was divided into ten regions which were staffed with United Nations officials.

(2) The electoral proclamation

The views of the Namibian people and the political parties on the legislation which had been drafted by South Africa had to be ascertained before negotiations on the proclamations could proceed. With the comments of people from all over the country as a basis, the Special Representative, Mr. Legwaila, his deputy, and legal aides negotiated the electoral proclamations with the South African Administrator General. The process of balancing the interests of all parties in the proclamation was time-consuming, Mr. Legwaila said. The final proclamation, on how the elections should be conducted, reflected the views of the Namibian people and the international community, he said.

READEX FICHE

(3) Supervision of the elections

The UNTAG staff had a difficult task in supervising the elections, Mr. Legwaila said. Yet, with less manpower than South Africa, UNTAG monitored all stages of the elections thoroughly. For instance, the unarmed UNTAG police force guarded ballot boxes night and day. All parties, even those who lost the elections, agreed that the elections had been free and fair. There was no violence during the elections, Mr. Legwaila said.

The last hurdle for UNTAG was to negotiate the constituent assembly proclamation. This proclamation would set up the assembly whose responsibility was to draft the constitution. After lengthy consultations, and with assistance from the international community, a good proclamation was produced, in Mr. Legwaila's view. The Constituent Assembly was convened seven days after the certification of the elections, and the Constitution was completed eight weeks later.

The Namibian constitution may be better than that of any other democratic country, Mr. Legwaila said. It was the only African constitution to limit the President to two terms in office, and it was the only constitution in the world which used he or she in the text, according to Mr. Legwaila. It guaranteed all possible aspects of human rights and also addressed women's issues. The Namibian constitution abolished the death penalty and preventive detention, as well as ensuring that the President's executive powers were controlled by checks and balances. According to Mr. Legwaila, it was a constitution which emphasized affirmative action.

Seven political parties were represented in Parliament, Mr. Legwaila said. At one point there were 48 parties. That number was reduced by amalgamations and by the registration law which imposed qualifications some parties could not meet. There was no doubt that Namibia was run by a pluralistic, democratic government, Mr. Legwaila said.

Looking to the future, Mr. Legwaila said the United Nations did not necessarily have to replicate the Namibian model in upcoming operations. First of all, it was important that new transition assistance plans - for instance, in Western Sahara and Cambodia - left the United Nations with unassailable veto power in the implementation process. With the support of the United Nations and the international community, the final arbiter had to be the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Legwaila said. As in the case of Namibia, he said, the United Nations had to deploy the best personnel it could afford in future operations.

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UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/90/19

THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE OFFICE FOR RESEARCH AND THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

On 24 May 1990, Mr. James O.C. Jonah, Assistant Secretary-General, Office for Research and the Collection of Information (ORCI), briefed NGOs on the role and functions of the Office.

Mr. Jonah began by discussing the United Nations Secretary-General's need for the kind of international information-gathering capacities which ambassadors and embassies provide for policy-makers in sovereign states. He described the difficulties encountered by past United Nations Secretaries-General in gathering objective information necessary for United Nations peace-making activities, and the resultant attempts to overcome these difficulties by employing United Nations personnel abroad in various capacities to relay relevant information back to the Secretariat. The Group of Eighteen on United Nations reform later determined that there was need for rationalization in information-gathering at the United Nations for peace-making and other political functions. In view of this judgment the Office for Research and the Collection of Information (ORCI) was established in 1987 to be the United Nations' focal point for international data-gathering, processing and reporting to meet the needs of the Secretary-General in the area of preventive diplomacy.

The Office is directly attached to the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the head of ORCI reports directly to him. Mr. Jonah said ORCI is divided into four areas. The first, dealing with data systems, research and methods of early-warning, maintains a close dialogue with the world's universities and other research institutions on current trends and topics of research in world affairs. This section of ORCI is also concerned

with potential refugee flows and with ways and means of averting them, if possible. In light of its analysis of potential refugee flows, the office may make recommendations to the Secretary-General regarding options to prevent such refugee flows before they occur.

The second area of ORCI, concerned with the gathering and processing of data, consisting of two units, one concentrating on Africa and Asia, the other on the Americas and Europe. These data units are in the process of compiling "profiles" on each country. These "country profiles" are kept up-to-date on an on-going basis, thus developing a data bank capable of providing information on current political situations. Mr. Jonah said the data is very useful in foreseeing potential trouble spots in world affairs, and is therefore of great help in formulating and implementing preventive measures before a "storm" breaks. The units make this information readily available to the Secretary-General's office and also prepare reports on specific issues at his request.

The third unit of ORCI is the News Distribution Section. Here the world's primary news/wire services are monitored and several news bulletins, comprised of brief news items from the wire services, newspapers and other sources, are produced several times a day for concerned United Nations personnel. This service provides senior United Nations officials with the most up-to-date information available on world events.

The fourth area of ORCI is the Drafting Service. The primary function of this service is to prepare speeches for the Secretary-General, drawing on the research and thinking in ORCI as a whole.

ORCI has become an important tool of diplomacy for the Secretary-General because it provides his office with an objective source of background information. During United Nations negotiations, ORCI is often called upon to study additional policy options when obstacles to resolution arise. Mr. Jonah emphasized the importance of close contact between the Office of the Secretary-General and ORCI.

Mr. Jonah also mentioned that a proposal to transform ORCI into a "War Risk Reduction Center" is currently being discussed within the UN. If this proposal were implemented, the office would, in addition to its present tasks, also analyze economic and social factors and trends as they relate to political and security issues. This, however, was only a proposal at present, as Mr. Jonah pointed out.

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UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/90/20

A UNITED NATIONS PERSPECTIVE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

On 31 May 1990, Mr. Victor Sukhodrev, Special Assistant to the Secretary-General, United Nations, briefed NGOs with a United Nations perspective on recent developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In the past few months the world has witnessed a series of developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which should be regarded collectively as the most momentous events since the end of World War Two in the opinion of Mr. Sukhodrev. They have been particularly sensational because they were for the most part entirely unforeseen. The most dramatic symbol in this process of change has been the fall of the Berlin Wall which has for so long epitomized the division of Europe, and indeed the world, into East and West.

Mr. Sukhodrev said the sweeping changes in Eastern Europe were made possible and even precipitated by the revolutionary winds of Gorbachev's perestroika in the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership which came to power in 1985 was faced with the stark reality of a gigantic world power going to rack and ruin unless drastic steps were taken to restructure the entire system of Soviet economic management. This realization necessitated the rethinking of the basic philosophy which had previously underpinned the very foundation of the system and had dictated the Soviet government's every move, be it in domestic or foreign affairs.

Although the situation in each country is unique, Mr. Sukhodrev outlined a number of similarities common to each. He said that there has been a general tendency to move away from totalitarianism toward democracy. In each case the changes have been systemic in nature, altering the entire form of social order, which had heretofore been based on the administrative command system of a "party state." The changes signified the fact that "real socialism" had discredited itself, which in terms of foreign policy amounted to the end of the post-war division of Europe, necessitating a functional transformation of the Warsaw Pact.

Though they took most everyone by surprise, Mr. Sukhodrev said the changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union did not come out of the blue. On the contrary, they have been the culmination of a long-developing series of internal difficulties, whose bases were the authoritarian bureaucratic system and dogmatic ideological tenets of state socialism. He added that despite attempts to modernize it, state socialism in these countries had started to show its political, social and economic deficiencies as early as the nineteen-seventies.

Mr Sukhodrev believes the problem has revolved around the systems' human rights violations, the glaring disparity between the promises of the leaders and their actual achievements, and the alienation of the people from policy-making and from any real participation in choosing their leaders. As the rest of the industrial world was going through a period of scientific and technological revolution, it became increasingly evident that the communist countries were falling behind economically and in terms of human welfare. The administrative model of governance based on the single omnipotent ruling party became an obstacle to progressive reform. Mr. Sukhodrev noted that even in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev the Communist Party took some time to reach this conclusion, and when it finally did move to rid the Soviet constitution of the "one-party" clause, it did so only under popular pressure. Mr. Sukhodrev believes that for a long time the party leadership entertained illusions about the creative potential allegedly inherent in a one-party system, but noted also that there is something to be said after all about the multiplicity of views within one party. After all, he said, Boris Yeltsin, perhaps the Soviet Unions's most vocal advocate of liberal reform, is a member of and rose out of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee. Mr. Sukhodrev qualified this thought, however, by noting that diversity of view should not really seem unusual when one considers such diversity within a communist party encompassing nineteen million members.

In the Soviet Union it was Gorbachev and a close group of his supporters that initiated perestroika and glasnost. In the countries of Eastern Europe, however, Mr. Sukhodrev believes the leaders of the old ruling parties proved themselves totally incapable of accepting reform. He believes they clung to what he perceives as their dogmatic and sectarian views and consequently lost whatever credence they may have enjoyed with the people. Where they did initiate reforms, allowing other political parties to emerge, they were swept out of office in democratic multi-party elections (Poland, Hungary, etc). The powerful, monolithic communist parties disintegrated once separated from the state machinery. As the opposition laid the blame for the economic crises at their feet, the communist parties broke up into competing factions of traditionalists and reformers, in most cases fatally handicapping them.

Throughout 1988-89 Gorbachev had stressed his commitment to the principles of respect for national sovereignty, non-interference and the recognition of each country's freedom to choose its own path to development. Well before the dramatic events of last fall, the Soviet leaders, Gorbachev in particular, repeatedly warned the Eastern European communist leaders of the

risks involved in trying to deny the need for instituting dramatic reforms and for ending the economic stagnation that was strangling the region. Mr. Sukhodrev noted that during the celebrations that marked the fortieth anniversary of the GDR last fall, Gorbachev, standing next to East German leader Erich Honecker, declared publicly that those who failed to move in step with the changing times would inevitably be thrown back. Several weeks later Honecker was removed from office and the wall came tumbling down.

According to Mr. Sukhodrev, these warnings and advice fell largely on deaf ears and the events that ensued demonstrated that without a Soviet safety net or Soviet military intervention as a last resort, the regimes of Eastern Europe had no legs left on which to stand. In a recent newspaper interview Soviet Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze, responding to criticism that the Soviet leadership had allowed the Eastern Bloc to crumble, said that these occurrences were the inevitable outcome of Stalin's post-war attempt to impose upon the peoples of Eastern Europe a system which was totally alien to their way of life, their traditions and their cultures.

The Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries are now moving toward a market economy. The differences in their approaches lay primarily in the degree and pace at which they are doing so. According to Mr. Sukhodrev, the largest obstacle to economic liberalization in the East lies in the fact that after decades of eliminating the market culture--including profit motivation, work discipline, acceptance of private property and a sense of individual initiative--the people have to be re-educated in these areas. An additional obstacle arises in attempting to reconcile the loss of the social protection and security the people enjoyed under the old system. Mr. Sukhodrev noted that both the Soviet and Eastern European leadership have expressed interest in participating in international economic organizations both within and outside the UN system, as well as the CSCE (under Basket 2 of the Helsinki Final Act). The EEC could also be of particular significance according to Mr. Sukhodrev.

He said also that the nineties may be expected to be a decade of continued turbulence in Eastern Europe and the USSR followed by stability and a greater commonality of interests. At the same time, Mr. Sukhodrev predicts that the coming decade will bring a period of diminishing tensions and continuing disarmament, which will necessitate a search for new structures of European security.

Mr Sukhodrev concluded his briefing by quoting the words of United Nations Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar when he addressed the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on 8 May at Comenius University in Bratislava: "Your country has entered a new era and there are moving signs of a renaissance. I see a great ferment of ideas around here. I have no doubt that, combined with a healthy realism and due regard for progress on a stable basis, the recent thinking will not only lead your country to a bright future but also enhance its capacity to contribute to world peace." This was Mr. Sukhodrev's wish for all of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.